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ABSTRACT

Twenty-seven representatives from the United Kingdom's Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), higher education (HE), careers services, careers service companies, schools, further education colleges, local education authorities, and relevant national organizations met to discuss ways of forming and enhancing partnerships between guidance services within and outside HE and supporting careers education across sectors. The discussions resulted in 13 recommendations regarding the following 3 areas: progression; accreditation (of programs and individuals); and linkages. Among the recommendations were the following: (1) DfEE should audit and disseminate information about existing cross-sectoral activities; (2) the feasibility of developing a career management skills unit should be explored; (3) professional bodies in the guidance field should seek stronger collaborative structures to encourage cross-sectoral understanding, cooperation, and exchanges of information and practice; (4) accrediting bodies should work with schools, colleges, and careers services to develop appropriate forms of portfolio-based assessment of career development skills; (5) DfEE should commission a mapping exercise on existing forms of collaboration between careers service companies and HE careers services and

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use the mapping exercise as a basis for determining possibilities for more extensive collaboration; and (6) relevant organizations should seek opportunities to development stronger linkages at the national and regional levels. (MN)

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CRAC NICEC
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Progression in Careers Education

Report on a NICEC/CRAC invitational policy consultation held on 12-13 March 1998 at the Belmont Hotel, Leicester

sponsored by the Choice and Careers Division and the Higher Education and Employment Division of the Department for Education and Employment

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Careers education programmes are now widely provided in schools and colleges and in higher education. This raises the issue of whether progression in such programmes might be supported across sectors. This is closely linked to the question of whether it is possible to accredit their learning outcomes. It is also related to whether – as recommended in the Dearing Report – a closer partnership might be formed between guidance services within higher education and those outside.

The aims of the consultation were:

To develop a clear understanding of issues related to *progression* in careers education – prior to, in and beyond higher education.

To examine good practice related to *accreditation* of learning outcomes from careers education across the sectors.

To examine how better *linkages* might be established between careers services in higher education and careers service companies.

The consultation was chaired by Professor Roger Waterhouse, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Derby. The 27 participants included representatives from DfEE, from higher education careers services, and from careers service companies, plus other representatives from schools, colleges, LEAs, higher education institutions, and relevant national organisations.

This report records the main themes of the debate and the recommendations made. It is written by Tony Watts, Director of NICEC. It does not necessarily represent the views of the consultation sponsors, or of any particular individual at the event.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation sponsored by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

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CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment.

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PROGRESSION

In considering progression in the development of career management skills (plus related knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values), a distinction needs to be drawn between:

- Individual progression.
- Programme progression.

Individual progression requires the active engagement of the student, which means that interventions need to be relevant and timely in relation to their needs. The nature of these needs will vary, according to the extent to which the individual is concerned with:

- Maintenance.
- Incremental change.
- Transformational change.

The time-frame, too, will vary:

- In some cases, engagement will occur when students see the need to develop career management skills in relation to their entry into the labour market or into a further course of study – and even, perhaps, their longer-term career progression.
- In other cases, students will see the need for immediate applicability, in relation to managing the student phase of their career (including, for example, investing their time in student activities and part-time jobs, possibly linked to a consideration of the personal and employability skills they will yield from such investment).

Effective careers education programmes need to be synchronised as closely as possible with individual progression. *Programme* progression needs, therefore, to be flexible enough to attend to differences in the nature and pace of individual progression. This becomes increasingly difficult beyond compulsory schooling because the needs and circumstances of individual learners become even more diverse.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's forthcoming report on learning outcomes from careers education and guidance programmes identifies progressive learning outcomes at Key Stages 1-4 and post-16 in relation to various aspects of self-development, career exploration and career management. For example:

Self development

KS1	I can say what I am good at doing
KS2	I can say what I am good at doing
KS3	I can explain what I am good at doing
KS4	I can assess my qualities, skills and achievements
P16	I can assess my qualities, skills and achievements

(Draft version)

One possibility, in theory, would be to add a further level of higher education outcomes to such lists. But the notion of such linear programme progression across sectors is not realistic:

- It would require a very rigid entitlement on which to build, including much tighter specification of what is provided in schools (the QCA learning outcomes are purely advisory in nature).
- Even then, it would take no account of the fact that many students in higher education are mature adults.
- The discrepancies with the variability of individual progression would quickly undermine the credibility of such a model.

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Nonetheless, a focus on learning outcomes is helpful in a number of respects:

- It helps to make the aims of careers education programmes transparent to students, which aids their individual progression in learning.
- Its focus on the learner helps to limit the impact of institutional agendas and funding regimes, which otherwise can distort provision.
- It is congruent with the Dearing Report's recommendations regarding clearer specification of the learning outcomes from HE learning programmes in general.

It might accordingly be worth exploring the possibility of developing a framework of such learning outcomes in the form of graded competences, which could be floated free of particular ages or institutional structures. This could provide a basis for individuals to identify the competences they need to acquire or to develop further.

It is important to recognise, however, that learning in this area is spiral in nature: revisiting the same core competences, but at higher (or deeper) levels. The 'compression' and 'lift-off' points in such spirals will be irregular, and vary between individuals.

The spiral nature of the learning poses a semantic challenge: to find language which enables individuals to recognise the similarities with what they have done before, so that they can consciously build upon it; but which also seems fresh and not merely repetitive. The general tendency of schools and colleges to refer to 'careers education', and of higher education to refer to 'career management skills', is perhaps helpful in this respect (though there is some overlap of usage in both directions).

In exploring such issues, there is much to be gained from cross-sectoral project activity. Many of the issues being addressed in schools/colleges and in higher education regarding the development of careers education programmes and related activities are basically similar. Sharing existing practice and engaging in joint development work in relation to such issues will be mutually beneficial, as well as enabling more attention to be paid to harmonisation and progression.

It is accordingly recommended that:

- **Recommendation 1** DfEE should audit and disseminate information about existing cross-sectoral activities (e.g. Leicestershire Progression Accord; Recording Achievement Consortium; proposed Regional Partnership/Curriculum Effectiveness Unit in the North-West) and also about single-sector activities related to progression which might be capable of cross-sectoral development.
- **Recommendation 2** DfEE should fund 1/2-year cross-sectoral development projects: e.g. on progression in learning from experience of work contexts; on use of the NRA/Progress File across sectors (including innovative use of IT); on progression in the development of key skills; and on sharing longitudinal information on student destinations and experiences, for 'dynamic feedback/feedforward' purposes.
- **Recommendation 3** The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and DfEE should investigate the feasibility of developing a career management skills unit – competency-based, with levels, but free of age-related expectations – which could be used on a cross-sectoral basis.
- **Recommendation 4** As a first step towards Recommendation 3, QCA and DfEE should commission a cross-sectoral mapping and research project on career management skills, examining different definitions and models for the development of such skills in different contexts, and the feasibility of relating them to each other within an overarching framework.
- **Recommendation 5** Professional bodies in the guidance field (including ACACHE, AGCAS, CSNA, ICG, NACGT, NAEGA, NAMSS) should seek stronger collaborative structures to encourage cross-sectoral understanding, co-operation, and exchanges of information and practice.

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ACCREDITATION

As with progression, accreditation takes two forms:

- Accreditation of programmes.
- Accreditation of individuals.

Programme accreditation is part of the course-validation and quality-assurance processes within institutions. The Government's response to the Dearing Report states that careers education and guidance within higher education institutions will be reviewed periodically by the Quality Assurance Agency. At school/college level, systems for implementing local quality standards have been developed in many areas. The Guidance Council's recently developed quality standards provide a potential basis for harmonising such standards across sectors.

Individual accreditation is more problematic. The potential advantages of such accreditation are:

- Within an institutional culture where value tends to be measured in terms of assessed outcomes, it legitimises careers education as a worthwhile activity.
- It accordingly adds value and motivation for students.
- It also increases credibility with academic staff – especially important if they are to be actively involved in the delivery of career management programmes.
- It makes it easier to secure funding and other resources (including curriculum time), without which it is difficult to do anything worthwhile.
- It can add to the rigour of the activity.

The potential disadvantages are:

- It tends to externalise the focus of concern: students become more concerned with impressing the assessor (self-presentation) than with engaging in honest reflection (self-disclosure).
- It may distort the aims of careers education programmes, in favour of those which are easier to measure.
- In particular, it may lead to a greater emphasis on knowledge elements (e.g. opportunity awareness) and skills related to self-presentation (part of transition learning), and to less emphasis on more personal areas (e.g. self-awareness, decision learning).
- The notion of 'failing' on career management skills is problematic, and this difficulty is exacerbated if such failure can affect overall passmark or degree classification.

Regarding the latter point, it is however arguable that career management skills are closely related to individual autonomy, which in turn is a key element of 'graduateness' – the outcomes which higher education seeks and claims to produce. On this basis, assessment of such skills is a very legitimate part of degree assessment. On the other hand, it is questionable whether employers always want graduates with highly developed career management skills: some do; but some small and medium-sized employers in particular may be concerned that such graduates may move on too quickly.

The key issue is whether it is possible to find forms of accreditation which are congruent with the aims of careers education and therefore support the developmental process. This is easier where the overall model of assessment is broad and flexible, permitting a variety of assessment methods, and attending to the assessment of skills as well as knowledge. The proposed new record of achievement may provide enhanced opportunities for portfolio-based assessment.

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In this respect, it seems that more successful models of integrating careers education assessment into mainstream assessment are evident in higher education, where institutions

and indeed departments have more autonomy in relation to curriculum and assessment. There are, however, significant differences here: some institutions and departments are still tied to conventional forms of assessment, focused on end-of-course written examinations, and here integration of careers education assessment is more difficult.

In schools and colleges, most accreditation models are based on additional awards for bolt-on provision. This is especially true alongside GCSE/A-level courses. It runs the risk that provision will be seen as more relevant to students whose performance in the mainstream curriculum is likely to be modest, boosting their employability (the same can happen in higher education too). The inclusion of career management skills in GNVQs is, however, an example of more integrated approaches. An important issue for the redesign of the National Curriculum post-2000 is whether it will make it possible to incorporate careers education – and other aspects of personal and social development – in a more integrated way than at present, and what implications this will have for assessment and accreditation.

It is accordingly recommended that:

- **Recommendation 6** QCA, OFSTED, the Further Education Funding Council, the Quality Assurance Agency and institutions should review current and possible alternative forms of assessment and accreditation used in relation to careers education programmes, and the extent to which they support rather than distort the aims of such programmes.
- **Recommendation 7** QCA and DfEE should ensure that the revised National Curriculum gives value to the development of pupils' career management skills, with progression in such skills being built into the core of the curriculum as well into subject curriculum orders, and also being built into the assessment and inspection mechanisms.
- **Recommendation 8** Accrediting bodies should work with schools, colleges and careers services to develop appropriate forms of portfolio-based assessment of career development skills.

LINKAGES

The third theme of the consultation was based on the Dearing Report's recommendation that the Government, in the medium to long term, should integrate careers advice for lifelong learning, to complement services based inside higher education institutions' (*Higher Education in the Learning Society*, recommendation 11). The response to this recommendation stated that 'the Government will be addressing, with interested parties, the scope for closer working between careers services within and outside higher education'.

This has some links with the issues of progression and accreditation, but is also somewhat separate from them, particularly as careers services do not in general have the main responsibility for delivering the careers education curriculum: in schools and colleges, it is delivered by teachers, with careers service companies in a supportive role (though the growth of group work has produced some blurring of these roles); in higher education, careers services tend to be more prominent in planning and delivery, but often in conjunction with, or in a consultancy role to, teaching departments.

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Current relationships between careers service companies and higher education careers services range from competition, through involvement in informal or formal networks, to formal partnership arrangements. Areas of potential collaboration include:

- Sharing labour market information: Higher education careers services tend to be strong on national graduate labour market information; careers service companies on local labour market information. The expansion and localisation of higher education mean that more of its students are now seeking employment locally.

- Providing an adequate service to higher education students in further education institutions. These students are part of careers service companies' statutory client-group; they require graduate career information, but their institutions are not members of AGCAS.
- Work with higher education drop-outs and with unemployed graduates. These may look to higher education careers services for help, but may also look to careers service companies – particularly where they fall within New Deal arrangements.
- Collaboration in guidance networks to develop local strategies for adult guidance in the context of lifelong learning. The policy adopted for guidance within the Government's lifelong learning strategy following the consultation period on *The Learning Age* Green Paper – particularly in relation to Individual Learning Accounts and the University for Industry – will be significant in this respect. To work most effectively, guidance networks should have clear and shared goals, meet on 'neutral territory', and involve joint ownership.

Difficulties in relation to collaboration include:

- The two sets of services have different professional bodies and professional traditions (though a fair number of careers advisers in higher education have had the same DipCG training as those in careers service companies, plus experience of working in the Careers Service).
- The contracting-out of the careers service led to fears that some expansionist careers service companies might have predatory designs on higher education services.
- The geographical distribution of higher education institutions, and their regional, national and international orientation, mean that it is not always clear which higher education careers services should establish relationships with which careers service companies.

The political climate, however, seems now to be placing more emphasis on co-operation and less on competition. There is a growing vision that guidance should be conceptualised in the context of lifelong learning rather than within the boundaries of organisations, though this must be balanced against the need for services to be accessible to users and customised to their needs.

If stronger collaborative relationships are to be developed, some brokerage might be required. Funding can be a form of brokerage.

It is accordingly recommended that:

Recommendation 9 DfEE should commission a mapping exercise on existing forms of collaboration between careers service companies and higher education careers service, identifying examples of good practice, plus factors facilitating or impeding good practice.

Recommendation 10 DfEE should then organise one or more further consultations to use the mapping exercise as a basis for determining possibilities for more extensive collaboration.

Recommendation 11 Funding and bidding criteria should promote and support collaboration. In particular, DfEE should review whether it can provide incentives to such collaboration through its careers service contracts and through regional funding for cross-sectoral training and staff development.

Recommendation 12 DfEE in consultation with relevant bodies should create a national strategy framework within which local partnerships and collaborative activities can be developed.

Recommendation 13 AGCAS and ICG, with other relevant organisations, should seek opportunities to develop stronger linkages at both national and regional levels.

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